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INSIDE REPORT: *Rusk's Shrinking Power*

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WASHINGTON.

One piece of hard evidence to illustrate the declining influence of Secretary of State Dean Rusk is the fact that Rusk learned of Vice-President Hubert Humphrey's trip to Paris only when it was publicly announced by President Johnson.

Mr. Johnson, characteristically acting like the cat that swallowed the canary, announced that Humphrey (along with astronauts James A. McDivitt and Edward H. White II) would go to Paris—but never cleared it with the State Department. The President made his surprising announcement at a reception for the astronauts in the State Department. And that's where Rusk first got the word, eight hours before take-off.

It is true, as Rusk-men point out, that the President had earlier broached the possibility of the astronauts going abroad. The State Department (and space director James Webb) strongly recommended against it.

The President's proposal that Humphrey also make the trip hit Rusk without warning. Moreover, it was a bitter rebuke to State Department staff men whose advice and advance preparation for such a high-level junket never were sought at all.

The story of Rusk's surprise on being informed about Humphrey's sudden dispatch to Paris is symbolic of the larger story of Rusk's continuing decline in the Washington pecking order.

This decline is matched by the growing influence of Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara and White House national security chief McGeorge Bundy. For when the power center which ought to be filled by the State Department is left open, competing power centers automatically flow in.

A good example of today's Defense-vs.-State, McNamara-vs.-Rusk power equation came shortly after the State Department belittled the June 17 B-52 raid in Viet Nam as a \$20 million flop (a conclusion that wasn't limited to the State Department). Magically, this reaction by Rusk's minions was transformed overnight into loud applause and unstinting praise.

What happened? President Johnson was livid when he read reports of the initial State Department reaction.

He passed the word to Rusk: "Don't you want to get on the team?" This menacing suggestion was followed by a Presidential order that the State Department back up the official Pentagon position that, despite certain disappointments, the raid had proved a major point and achieved a solid success.

The Defense Department, operating under the resourceful, aggressive McNamara, out-fights, out-talks and often out-thinks Rusk and his State Department just about every time, as it did in the case of the B-52 raid. And the widely-credited reason is that Rusk simply refuses to commit himself to a course of action until too late.

Even diplomats who work for Rusk find it hard to pierce his outer reserve to learn what goes on underneath. "I never know what he really thinks about anything," one of these foreign service men confided to us.

There is, however, an occasional example of Rusk the policy-maker. Marshall Green, the Ambassador-designate to Indonesia, last week suggested at Rusk's regular staff meeting that the time might be ripe for the U. S. to mobilize its friends from Africa and Asia to counter the flow of vicious anti-U. S. propaganda from Algiers, where the second Afro-Asian Conference was about to start.

Under Secretary George Ball, Rusk's No. 2 man, advised a delay in any frontal U. S. action. The way things were going in Algiers, he said, Red China (source of the hostile propaganda) might trip and fall without an American assist. U. S. involvement at that stage might rock the boat.

Rusk backed Ball out loud. As it turned out, within days China suffered a disastrous propaganda defeat when the conference was adjourned over Chinese protests.

But this is unusual. Rusk is more inclined to listen and say nothing, or, if he speaks, to articulate each of the opposing sides in scripted phrases. That's one way to stay out of trouble. But it's no way to win policy wars in the bureaucratic jungles of Washington.

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